

AMERICAN OPINION

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on...

THE UNITED NATIONS

and on

DISARMAMENT

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A review of developments, October 16-November 15, 1962

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Chief Developments

1. The UN was held by a number to have served a useful purpose in the Cuban affair, with emphasis on its service as a channel of mediation. However, several UN critics suggested that the UN was powerless, or useless, in this case.
2. Ambassador Stevenson's handling of the Cuban crisis was highly praised.
3. The desire for progress toward a nuclear test ban agreement continues strong; but the conviction that verification is essential may have been intensified by the Cuban crisis experience.

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THE RELATION OF THE UN TO THE CUBAN CRISIS

The majority view reflected in comment on the role of the UN in the Cuban crisis was that the UN served a useful purpose, but that its power was limited. However, several critics of the UN seemed to feel that it served no useful purpose, or possibly tended to make matters worse. (Much of the voluminous comment on the crisis made no mention of the UN.)

The predominant conception of the UN's function that emerged from the comment noted is that the UN's usefulness is not as a kind of world government, but as a mediator, or channel of communication.

Mediation Beyond such steps as possible General Assembly dispatch of representatives to define "the nature of the Soviet buildup" in Cuba, the New York Post suggested, the Secretary-General's office "can and should become a catalyst for large mediation efforts behind the scenes."

A few days later, after U Thant had gone to Cuba to try to arrange for international inspection of Soviet missile withdrawal, the Boston Herald declared that he "has demonstrated that he, as spokesman of the world organization, can moderate between great enemies as well as great friends, and by so doing he has cut out a new role not only for himself but for the UN."

The function of the UN "became one not of enforcing peace, but of facilitating it by means of conciliation and mediation," the Providence Journal commented (somewhat similarly, Chicago Herald).

Face-Saving The UN "can provide a vent for steam," the Washington Post said, and it can "give other countries an opportunity to make proposals that can offer a face-saving out for rival great powers."

As the Louisville Courier-Journal saw it, the UN's values suddenly became apparent. "It stood, experienced and prepared, the honest broker in a situation where face must be preserved, where back was of the essence, and where the defusing that must be done could not be left to the two great antagonists in the Caribbean." According to Hilt Breidenheim, the great UN role "was as a face-saving agency." He said: "It allowed the Soviets to bow to American demands while posing before the targets of their world-wide propaganda as benevolent peace mongers."

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Communication
and Absorption

The UN played three parts in the Cuban crisis, Joseph C. Harsch wrote: 1) "It acted as a post-office"; 2) "It provided an opportunity or excuse for keeping the line of communication open"; 3) "It provides the machinery for implementing the agreed settlement."

Eric Sevareid saw a reminder of the usefulness of the UN, "not in terms of any initial or independent action of its own, but in terms of its capacity to deflect, absorb, justify and legalize the actions of the great powers."

UN
Limitations

The inability of the UN to get the missiles out of Cuba was assumed by some of those commenting. The Baltimore Sun, after expressing a wish that the UN had the power and the will to effect the removal of Soviet offensive weapons from Cuba and "make certain against their return," said: "Since we cannot see that today it does, we must try other ways, with such help as the United Nations may be able to give."

The Chicago Sun-Times noted that the U.S. government, before taking unilateral action to eliminate the missiles buildup, called upon the UN to take steps for "the prompt dismantling and withdrawal" of offensive weapons from Cuba. "It is doubtful that the UN can take such action with any prospect of success," the Sun-Times said, adding: "Mr. Kennedy acted wisely and properly, however, in first submitting this facet of the problem to the UN."

The Philadelphia Inquirer asserted that "a Communist's word is no word at all and the U. N. cannot guarantee compliance." At the end of October, the New York Herald Tribune said: "It was not the possibility of UN intervention that made Khrushchev promise to call off his rockets, but the sure knowledge" that the U.S. was prepared to act with force "to remove the military threat."

Criticism Critics of the UN questioned its effectiveness in sharper language. "The United States has drawn the line," the Chicago Tribune said. "To allow itself now to get fouled up in the tortuous sterilities of U.N. parliamentary procedure or in the billingsgate of Khrushchev would be to retreat."

One view was that the UN was essentially powerless to act effectively in such a situation. The UN "cannot be seriously viewed as an accurate reflection of the world power equation," the Wall Street Journal commented. "So it is that when the two great powers get on a collision course, the actual sequence of events proceeds without much reference to the UN, even though

there is constant talk about the UN's role." If we "place too much reliance on the UN we will be hampered" in meeting our responsibilities, the Wall Street Journal concluded. The Indianapolis Star, expecting that UN action on missile dismantlement would be prevented by Soviet veto, asserted that "after a short interval of consultation, the President must move to dismantle the sites."

Questioning the reliability of international inspection teams, Dick Henry wrote: "Judging by the personnel included in Thant's original party which accompanied him to Cuba there weren't more than one or two who would know the difference between a guided missile and a king-size cigar" (in Los Angeles Times).

The political views of the acting Secretary General were viewed with suspicion by some critics. The Cincinnati Enquirer said that after President Kennedy acted, U Thant asked the U.S. "to undo what it had sought to do in the interests of its own survival." He "was strangely silent when the stability of the Western Hemisphere was being subverted by Castroism," this paper said.

The Chicago Tribune asserted: "Thant's disposition to parrot the Cuban tyrant's bleats about 'sovereignty' expose the secretary general as a faker or somebody who is childishly naive."

Problems At least a few observers believed that the UN was enhanced coming out of the crisis with enhanced prestige. The Boston Herald said: "Not the least significant result of the Cuban crisis has been the restoration of the prestige of the United Nations as a peace-keeping force." It concluded that in future disputes Moscow and Washington may turn to the Secretary-General "first instead of last," and if they do "the world will be a more secure place in which to live."

To the Kansas City Times, it appeared "likely that the United Nations may come out of this business with enhanced prestige, thanks largely to the yeoman work of its acting secretary-general."

AMBASSADOR STEVENSON AND THE CUBAN CRISIS

Ambassador Stevenson's handling of the Cuban crisis and the UN received high praise for its carefulness and effectiveness. The Indianapolis Star, after referring to Mr. Stevenson's "current, highly effective clashes with the Russians" in the Security Council, said "he has been unusually effective, especially as his rhetoric strayed away from the familiar eloquent but sometimes too-subtle Stevensonian style." Scripps-Howard's W.D. Friedenberg

wrote: "He is speaking with his accustomed skill and eloquence-- plus new fire."

Edward Bennett Williams characterized Ambassador Stevenson as "a magnificent advocate, trying one of the most important cases in modern history." The Philadelphia Inquirer expressed belief that he "did a magnificent job of stating the American case in the Cuban missile debate...and even better in his slashing attack on the Russian position and the fumbling deceptions of Soviet Ambassador Gromyko."

Even the usually critical Chicago Tribune said: "His eloquent, fiery, and effective presentation of the case of the United States concerning the treachery and deadliness of the Soviet missile and bomber buildup in Cuba was wholly admirable." This paper interpreted Mr. Stevenson's words...as evidence of a change of mind and heart in the Kennedy administration."

Others used such terms as "strong and reasoned" (Max Lerner), "power and ardor" (N.Y. Herald Tribune), "best performance since he took his job at the U.N." (Time magazine). The Watertown Times said: "None other...could have poured on the coal and built up a head of steam to equal Stevenson's." The Cleveland Plain Dealer referred to his "stinging attack," and said that his "poise, diction and choice of words never were better."

Holding that "he earned for himself and the cause of freedom a new dimension of respect," Scripps-Howard's Washington News said: "Always lucid, ever eloquent, Ambassador Stevenson proved before the United Nations that he is also a tough and aggressive advocate, quick to probe the weakness of a lie and to demolish it with proof."

SOUTH AFRICA

The determined Afro-Asian drive for expulsion of the Republic of South Africa from the UN and imposition of economic sanctions evoked strong editorial opposition. Endorsing the U.S. vote against the resolution in the General Assembly, observers voiced "revulsion" toward apartheid, but insisted that to eject South Africa from the UN would be "contrary to the spirit of the Charter and bad policy, in every way" (e.g. Boston Herald; N.Y. Times, Wash. Post).

To establish the precedent that a sovereign state can be evicted from the UN because the majority disagrees with its policy would "undermine the organization's near-universality" and "soon bring the UN to its end," they warned (e.g., Milwaukee Journal, Christian Century). A number stressed the "inconsistency" of the